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ABSTRACT

Through careful selection of trade books, teachers can promote children's awareness of language. This paper cites numerous trade books that may be used to help children develop appreciation of alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhythm, and rhyme, and it recommends a number of alphabet books, animal stories, and books in which word meanings, interesting concepts, and word histories are explored. The books cited are those that have demonstrated appeal for children. (GW)

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FASCINATING CHILDREN WITH WORDS THROUGH TRADEBOOKS

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We know that children love "the tutor who tooted the flute," and "the fly and the flea in the flue," and "Betty Batter's bitter butter," and "Pop who bottles pop bottles in pop shops."

We have seen children - wide-eyed and completely attentive to Max's meeting with the "wild things." It is not just the illustrations of the huge, horned, tailed, long-clawed, saw-toothed creatures and Max's expert handling of them that make children gasp; it is also the sound of those words . . . "And when he came to the place where the wild things are, they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws."[1] When, therefore, good storytellers and master teachers tell us that children respond to alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, rhythm, syntactical patterns and twists in their language, we are not surprised. Linguists agree. Carl Lefevre says that "Appreciation of the sound of the English language - its rhythms, tunes, and patterns - is the key to enjoyment of literature."[2]

If we know that there are certain language features to which children respond, ought we select books with those in mind? No and Yes. To read literature just for its alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, rhythm, syntactical patterns and twists would be an improverishment of literature even an

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[1]Maurice Sendak, Where the Wild Things Are. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

[2]Carl Lefevre, Linguistics, English, and The Language Arts. New York: Teachers College Press, p. 264.

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abomination because great literature is more than the sum of its parts. Yet to be exposed to tradebooks wherein development of plot, character, setting is accomplished via such elements is to build a foundation for the child to reflect upon language as it is used to tell the story. To begin to think about the words he and other people use is a vital part of a child's linguistic growth. Psycholinguists, who engage in charting the use and understanding of language by children, term the child's ability to reflect on his own language "metalinguistic awareness." The youngster who says that the kitten "runned up the pole" and then stops himself in mid-sentence to say, "I mean ran up the pole," is listening to himself and has probably listened to many others use that irregular past tense.

Certainly we want to encourage that listening to self and others - that reflection upon language that should yield richer, more original, more concise and precise use of words. There is no doubt that we can nurture metalinguistic awareness by the careful examination and selection of tradebooks. Our libraries for children - classroom, school and home - can include tradebooks which will make the child-reader more linguistically aware and curious.

There are such tradebooks; they quite deliberately, build the child's interest in stories, by cleverly using the sounds of words, the letters in words and letter patterns, the variant forms of words, the analogic use of words, the connotational and denotational differences in words. What's more, they have sense appeal. They intrigue the ear when told and the eye when read. They entice the child to look at his language critically and de-

lightedly. What books are they? First of all, there are those rich in the four qualities already mentioned. Then there are a host of others which speak to additional language aspects about which children are fascinated.

From the poem, "Little Charlie Chipmunk" by Helen LeCron to Mosel's Tikki, Tikki, Tembo to Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," alliteration has been used and enjoyed. According to the Dictionary of Literary Terms,[3] alliteration is a very old device, older even than rhyme in English verse. It used to be an essential part of the metrical scheme in Old English but is now used for special effect only. It is phonemically pleasant and conspires to create semantic humor so it is often part of nonsense verse and children love it. They are likely to call tongue twisters "jaw breakers" and these permeate their street chants and game rhymes. Peter and Iona Opie suggest that sheer coincidence of sound delights children[4] who chuckle at theirs and others' attempts to tell of "Godfrey Gordon Gustavus Gore." They delight in Brewton's My Tang's Tungled and Other Situations and in Alvin Schwartz's many compilations including A Twister of Twists, A Tangler of Tongues. Children, in their growing mastery of the sound system, listen to parts from books like these to supply them with models of articulation, practice and amusement.

Onomatopoeia delights youngsters too. They react quickly to Susie's splishes and sploshes not only because of the alliteration but the onomatopoeia.

3J.A. Cuddon, A Dictionary of Literary Terms. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977, p. 26.

[4]Iona & Peter Opie, The Lore & Language of Schoolchildren. London, Oxford University Press, 1959.

Children love Roar and More where

"Giraffes don't huff or hoot or howl
They never grump, they never growl.
They never roar, they never riot,
They eat green leaves
And just keep quiet."[5]

They enjoy Spier's Gobble, Growl and Grunt and Crash, Bang, Boom. They like O'Neill's What Is That Sound? and the classic final page (indeed all the pages) of Emberly's Drummer Hoff. For older children onomatopoeia surfaces in mystery stories like Joan Kahn's Some Things Strange and Sinister and Manley and Lewis's Masters of the Macabre and Mistresses of Mystery as well as the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

Onomatopoeia seems schizoid, it can create contradictory moods, a characteristic which is beautifully illustrated in Margaret Wise Brown's Shh, Bang! Schizoid or not, children love and respond to it.

Of course, there is nothing quite like rhythm and rhyme for attracting children to words. Gertrud Wyatt in Language Learning and Communication Disorders in Children refers to children in need of compensatory language training and notes that in a group of such children, one little girl, though her articulation was poor, just delighted her playmates by her rich strongly

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[5]Karla Kuskin, Roar and More. New York: Harper & Row, 1956, not paged.

rhythmical language. "Looking at pictures in a book she would make up stories which might go something like this: 'The sun is up -- and it's time to get up - oh, yeah! The kids get out -- and they look at the sky -- oh, yeah!' and so forth. The words are simple but expressive and her enticing rhythm and the repetitive 'oh, yeah!' made the whole story move along like a rock-and-roll song."[6]

Scholars write treatises on rhythm in nature and man. It is mirrored in our phonemic system as stress and is heard in children's chants, songs, dances, marches, speech. Rhythm is movement and children love mobility. Rhythm is regular in verse; children can depend upon its beat and its patterning. Langstaff's many volumes of folk songs appeal to this sense of rhythm. Kellogg's There Was an Old Woman, The House That Jack Built; Karla Kuskin's "Spring," Sendak's Chicken Soup with Rice; Jack Prelutsky's many works; de Regniers, May I Bring a Friend all have strong rhythm and rhyme as do McGinley's Year Without a Santa Claus, Kuskin's Sand and Snow, Bodecker's Its Raining Said John Twaining, Hoberman's The Raucous Auk, and the works of David McCord, Eve Merriam and James Tippitt.

Rhyme will never cease to entrance. It speaks to the sense of music in us and we joy in the coincidence of sound. It helps in the composition of poems, glues the verse and the meaning together and helps the memory. From Mother Goose onward, it should be a part of each child's daily fare. Books like Horton Hatches the Egg and Krauss's Everything Under a Mushroom

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[6]Gertrud Wyatt, Language Learning and Communication Disorders in Children. New York: The Free Press, 1969, p. 261.

as well as many titles aforementioned make of literature a participatory "sport" rather than a spectator one. Children do join in on the refrain.

Besides alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhythm and rhyme, what else can tradebooks do to fascinate children with words? Many things.

Alphabet books show children the components of written expression - letters and letter patterns. At this point, we are rich in such books - Oxenbury, Kraus, Anno, Baskin, Munari, Matheisen have added to the store. And of course we just can't miss Lionni's Alphabet Tree where we can follow the caterpillar and put "the letters in sentences and mean something."

In addition to books which feature the sounds of words and letters in words, we have those which intrigue us because they speak to the vagaries of words , to their strange, variant forms - to what happens to them when we speak of one versus many, of young versus old, of opposites, of connotational and denotational meanings, of the histories of words.

Merriam's Small Fry is a delightful presentation of the young versus the old of the species - all about fingerlings, leverets and pups and cubs and calves. We know children love animal stories and the names of the young of the species do intrigue. Merriam's Gaggle of Geese fascinates us with group names. Spier's Fast-Slow, High-Low: a Book of Opposites and Tana Hoban's Push, Pull, Empty, Full are full of antonyms.

So many other appealing things can happen to words alone and in combination Tradebooks focus on these too. The same word can mean many different things. What a difference there is in teachers stating that linguistic generalization to children as opposed to reading them Krauss's A Hole Is to Dig or Natalie

Babbit's A Search for Delicious. A search also takes place in Vasiliu's The Most Beautiful Word and Nini and her friends finally conclude, after much discussion that "every word is the most beautiful word in its own time and place."

There are simple words - although strange - which can marvelously encompass highly complex concepts like tesseract in L'Engle's A Wrinkle in Time. Then there are words which children see suddenly in a new light. Seventh graders know about jars of paint, peanut butter, candy et al but the jar in "My Face" was something new to some of them.

"As a beauty I'm not a great star,
There are others more handsome by far,
But my face I don't mind it,
Because I'm behind it --
Tis the folks in the front that I jar."[7]

Anthony Euwer

We have books about strange word pairs that sound the same but are spelled differently and mean different things. When you illustrate the inappropriate member of the team, you raise many chuckles. Fred Gwynne does in The King Who Rained and Harold Longman does the same for the older child in Would You Put Your Money in a Sandbank? which contains such poems as -

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[7]Anthony Euwer as quoted in Bill Martin, Jr.'s Sounds of Mystery. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967, p. 40.

"A sole is a fish one can eat.
And soles are the soles of your feet.
A soul, we are told, is a spirit.
We can't see it or touch it or hear it.
This would all be most amusing
If it weren't so confusing."[8]

Then there are those ridiculous adventures that remarkable characters like Amelia Bedelia have because they take everything so literally. She takes cookies to home plate and dresses the poultry in fabric finery. She now has a friend in Louise McNamara's Henry's Pennies. Poor Henry saves his pennies for something very special and hears about a "white elephant sale." Alas!

There are also lovely books which show children the history and mystery of words like Adelson's Dandelions Don't Bite where you meet patchwords, word cousins, copycats and others. Then there are Gallant's Man Must Speak: The Story of Language and How to Use It and Bernice Kohn What a Funny Thing to Say! and Longman's What's Behind the Word?

Leo Lionni's Frederick records the delightful story of five diligent mice who are preparing for winter. Four of them gather corn, nuts, wheat, straw against the winter cold but not Frederick. He collects the sun rays, the colors, and words against winter's cold, drabness, and length. It is indeed Frederick's "supplies" that sustain the mice in the end. It is through

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[8] Harold Longman, Would You Put Your Money in a Sand Bank? Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1968.

the warmth, color, and poetry that his words create that their spirits are lifted.

Is it not possible for us to help all children to "collect" words - words to use when the winters of life chill their spirits as well as when the summers of life flood their hearts? Yes, it is. Tradebooks can help us do it.

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November 26, 1977

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Presentation
National Council Teachers of English
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1. Adelson, Leone. Dandelions Don't Bite. Pantheon
2. Babbit, Natalie. A Search for Delicious. Farrar, Straus and Giroux
3. Baylor, Byrd. Plink, Plink, Plink. Houghton-Mifflin
4. Bodecker, N. M. (Trans.) It's Raining Said John Twaining. Atheneum
5. Brewton, Sara; John, and G. Meredith Blackburn, Comps. My Tang's Tungled and Other Situations
6. Brown, Margaret Wise. Sh-h, Bang! Harper
7. Brown, Margaret Wise. The City Noisy Book. Harper & Row
8. Cuddon, J. A. A Dictionary of Literary Terms. Doubleday
9. De Regniers, Beatrice. May I Bring A Friend. Atheneum
10. Emberly, Ed. Drummer Hoff. Prentice Hall
11. Ewer, Anthony. "My Face" a Limerick
12. Gallant, Roy. Man Must Speak: The Story of Language and How to Use It.
13. Gwynne, Fred. The King Who Rained. E. P. Dutton/Windmill
14. Hoban, Tana. Push, Pull, Empty, Full: A Book of Opposites. MacMillan
15. Hoke, Helen (Ed.) Eerie, Weird and Wicked. Thomas Nelson
16. Hoke, Helen (Ed.) Creepies, Creepies, Creepies: A Covery of Quiver-and-Quake Tales. Franklin Watts
17. Hoke, Helen (Ed.) Ghostly, Grim and Gruesome. Thomas Nelson
18. Kahn, Joan. Some Things Strange and Sinister. Harper & Row
19. Kellogg, Steven. There was an Old Woman. Parents
20. Kohn, Bernice. What a Funny Thing to Say. The Dial Press
21. Kuskin, Karla. Roar and More. Harper & Row
22. Kuskin, Karla. Sand and Snow. Harper & Ros
23. Krauss, Ruth. Everything Under a Mushroom. Four Winds Press

24. Langstaff, John. Over in the Meadow. Harcourt

25. Langstaff, John. Frog Went a 'Courtin. Harcourt

26. Langstaff, John. Oh, A-Hunting We Will Go. Atheneum

27. Lefevre, Carl A. Linguistics, English, and The Language Arts. Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

28. L'Engle, Madeleine. A Wrinkle in Time. Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Dell

29. Lionni, Leo. Alphabet Tree. Pantheon

30. Lionni, Leo. Frederick. Pantheon

31. Lipton, James. An Exaltation of Larks. Grossman Publishers

32. Longman, Harold. What's Behind the Word. Coward-McCann

33. Longman, Harold. Would You Put Your Money in a Sand Bank. Rand McNally

34. Manley and Lewis. Masters of the Macabre. Doubleday

35. Manley and Lewis. Mistresses of Mystery. G. K. Hall

36. McGinley, Phyllis. Year without a Santa Claus. Lippincott

37. Merriam, Eve. A Gaggle of Geese. Knopf

38. Merriam, Eve. Small Fry. Alfred A. Knopf

39. O'Neill, Mary. What Is That Sound? Atheneum

40. Opie, Iona and Peter. The Lore & Language of Schoolchildren. Oxford

41. Schwartz, Alvin, Comp. A Twister of Twists, A Tangler of Tongues. J. B. Lippincott

42. Sendak, Maurice. Chicken Soup with Rice. Harper & Row

43. Sendak, Maurice. Where the Wild Things Are. Harper & Row

44. Spier, Peter. Crash, Bang, Boom and Gobble, Growl, Grunt. Doubleday & Co.

45. Spier, Peter. Fast - Slow, High - Low: A Book of Opposites. Doubleday & Co.

46. Stewig, John Warren. "Encouraging Language Growth," in Literature and Young Children. National Council of Teachers of English.

47. Vasiliu, Mercea. The Most Be-utiful Word. John Day.

48. Wyatt, Gertrude. Language Learning and Communication Disorders in Children. The Free Press